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INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS

United States Department of Agriculture

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THE MARKET BASKET

by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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BUTTER AND EGGS

Hens probably would cackle more loudly--and the cows give three cheering moos if they could read the egg and butter statistics of the United States. For the totals show that, so far this year, butter supplies of the nation have been much more plentiful than usual. And poultry flocks the country over have been setting new egg-laying records.

Since a "pound of butter" and a "dozen eggs" are leading items on many a marketing list, the present large supplies and low prices of both make headline food news.

Eggs

Eggs are rated as one of the protective foods needed in every diet. Nutrition specialists count them among the best of the body builders, and for that reason recommend that, when eggs are cheap and plentiful, one or more a day may be used to advantage by every member of the family. Of course, this includes the many eggs used in cooking.

In any roll call of food values, eggs answer "present" to proteins of excellent quality--important minerals--and to at least five of the vitamins in varying amounts. Eggs, especially the yolks, are an outstanding source of iron--a mineral in which many diets are low. They also are rich in calcium and phosphorus.

Vitamins that occur in eggs are vitamins A, B₁, D, G, and the pellagra-

preventing factor. All of the vitamin A and D value of eggs is in the yolk--the amount of each present depending upon the diet of the hen. Contrary to some impressions, color of the yolk is not a reliable indication of its food value because pale and more deeply-colored yolks may be equally good sources of important vitamins and minerals.

Consumers looking for good eggs on the market will do well to place more stress on the way an egg has been handled than on its age or on the color of its shell. An egg left in a warm nest all day, then kept in a warm place at night will be less fresh at 24 hours than an older egg that has been kept cool.

Color of shell has nothing to do with either egg quality or food value. Some breeds of hens lay eggs with dark brown shells because they deposit more pigment in the shells. More significant than whether or not an egg is brown or pale is the condition of the shell. For immediate use, eggs with cracked or thin, defective shells may be satisfactory. But those that are to be kept for any time should be free of these imperfections, because such eggs deteriorate rapidly.

In many stores, eggs graded by either local, State, or Federal graders are available. These grades are not uniform from State to State, although more and more concerns are adopting those set up by the United States Department of Agriculture.

When eggs are brought home from the store they should go into the refrigerator--but not necessarily in the coldest spot. They should not be put near highly-scented foods because they absorb odors and flavors. If shells are soiled, wipe them with a rough dry cloth or a metal sponge. But do not wash them, because water removes the "bloom" of the egg that forms a natural seal for the pores of the shell.

In cooking, eggs can be used in a variety of ways because of their versatile protein. They may be used for leavening, thickening, or clarifying cloudy soups. They are used to bind foods together in croquettes--to "stabilize" the oil in a

mayonnaise dressing.

In warm weather, when meals are lighter, egg souffles or omelets make excellent main dishes. Eggs Benedict, hard-cooked eggs in tomato or curry sauce, and baked eggs in tomato cups are some other main-dish possibilities. Hard-cooked eggs are used freely in the summertime for salads and sandwiches. Fluffy angel cakes, custards, and ice creams are a few of the desserts that make use of eggs.

In egg cooking, the secret of success is "always cook slowly at moderate even heat." High temperatures shrink the protein and make the eggs tough. Use a double boiler for most egg dishes cooked atop the stove. For an omelet use a smooth heavy pan and very low heat.

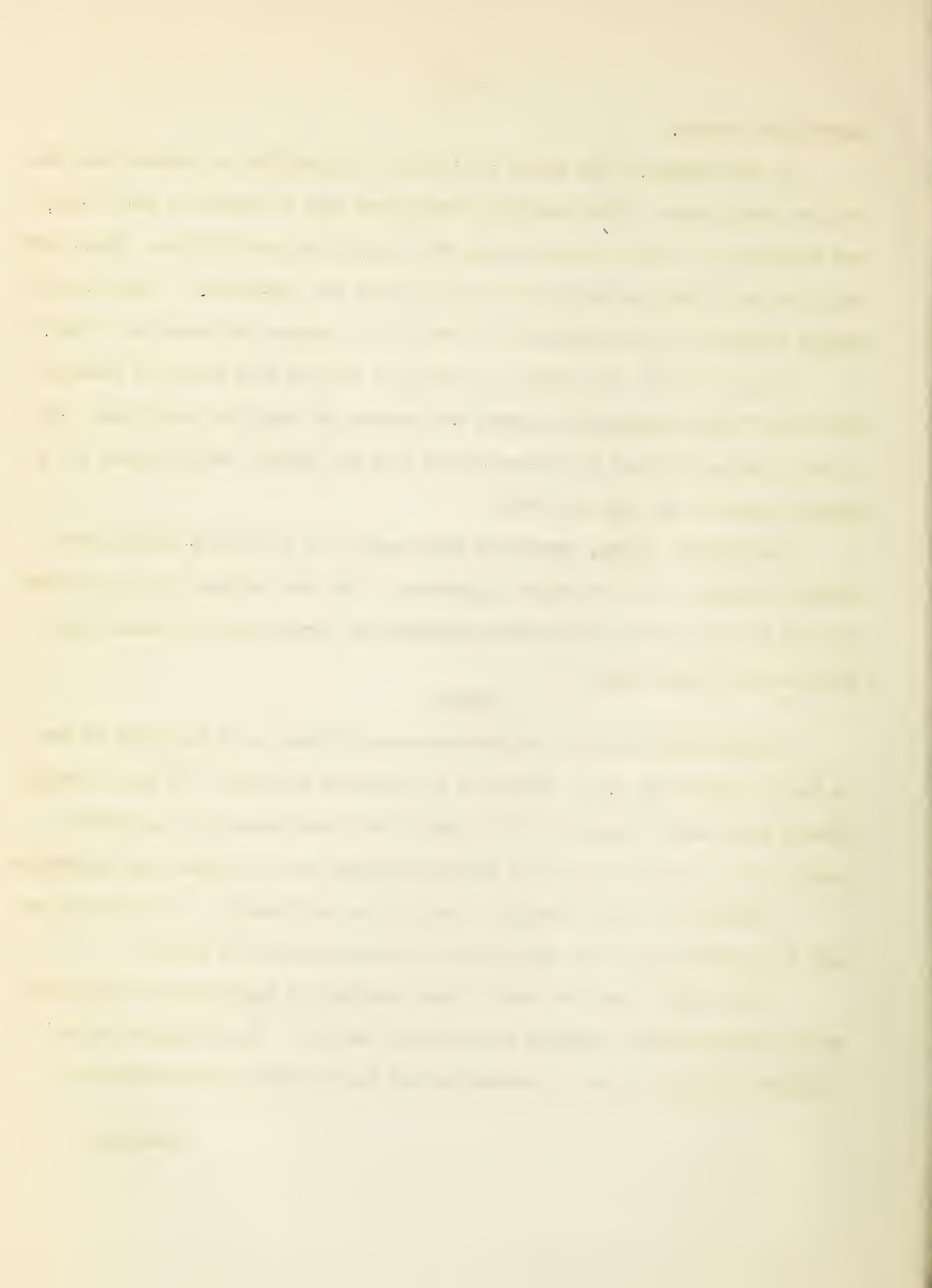
Many frozen dishes, especially those made in a mechanical refrigerator without stirring, call for beaten egg whites. The tiny bubbles of beaten white prevent the ice crystals from getting together to form large, icy masses that make the ice cream grainy.

Butter

Every meal--to make it satisfactory--should have in it some kind of fat so that it will "stay by." Butter is an excellent fuel food. It also contains vitamin A and some vitamin D. It's distinctive flavor makes it a desirable spread. It is commonly used as a shortening agent, and to season many vegetables.

Butter, like eggs, should be kept in the refrigerator. It needs to go into the coldest spot--away from foods with strong flavors or odors.

Since 1923, there has been a legal standard of identity for butter that enters into interstate commerce in the United States. This standard was established by Congress and is enforced by the Food and Drug Administration of



the U. S. Department of Agriculture. According to this Federal law, butter must be made exclusively from milk or cream and contain not less than 80 percent by weight of milk fat.

Each year the amount of butter that has been graded for quality increases on the market. Topnotch butter that has been given a score of 93 or 92 by State-Federal graders carries with it a certificate of quality--giving its score and the date of grading.

A good dish making use of both eggs and butter is Eggs Benedict. Toast slices of bread, or split and toast English muffins. Place on each piece of toast a thin slice of cooked ham or crisp cooked bacon, and on top of this a poached egg. Cover with hot Hollandaise sauce and serve at once.

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DRIED PRUNES AND DRY BEANS

Good to eat, easy to keep, and very little trouble to transport -- these are some of the homely virtues of dry beans and dried prunes. And it's for these qualities -- as well as for the food value they offer at low cost -- that each is a favorite with cooks the country over.

It is never "out-of-season" for either dry beans or prunes. Both are staple groceries, because their excellent keeping qualities make it possible to store them -- then to sell them as needed. Being sold now are prunes and beans harvested late last summer.

"Plentiful and low in price" -- is the phrase that describes the supplies of dry beans and dried prunes for the marketing season of 1938/39. In fact, current bean supplies are so plentiful that probably they will go down on record as the largest to date, according to estimates of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Homemakers who keep a weather eye open for inexpensive foods will find that dried prunes and dry beans have much to recommend them nutritionally. It's common cooking knowledge, of course, that both can be worked into numerous interesting table combinations.

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Dried Prunes

Dried prunes for the nation are produced by the three Pacific states -- with California leading the field. They are manufactured from special varieties of plums. These varieties, designated as prunes, are suited to drying, because they do not ferment when they are dried with the pits left in.

In harvest season, some prunes are sold fresh, but the bulk of the crop is dried. Most prunes from California are of the variety known as Agen to the horticulturist -- commonly called French or Petite. These are smaller and sweeter than the tart Italian prunes from Washington and Oregon.

Prunes are a good source of vitamin A and of iron. In addition they have a fair amount of vitamins B1 and G, and of calcium.

If prunes are cooked the right way they'll be plump and juicy when they are done. The juice will have good flavor, and there will be an attractive luster to the fruit. First step in getting prunes ready for the table is thorough washing in hot water. Next comes the soaking.

Soak prunes in hot water to cover for about an hour. If the fruit is the moist type that has had some water added in packing, soaking need not be so long or may be unnecessary. Do not throw away the water in which the prunes are soaked

Use this water for simmering prunes until they are tender. Here again, time varies with the kind of prunes. But on the average -- for an amount large enough to yield five or six servings -- about half an hour will be enough. If sugar is desired, add this to the prunes during the last five minutes of cooking. And add a little salt to bring out the good prune flavor. A little spice and vinegar may be added to prunes used to serve with meat.

Stewed prunes are favorites for breakfast -- sometimes with a little lemon or orange juice squeezed over them. Or they may be chopped and added to cooked cereal. In fruit cups they combine well with tart fruits--grapefruit, oranges,

and pineapple. With crisp vegetables such as shredded carrots or cabbage or with tart fruits, whole prunes with the seeds removed combine to make unusual salads. For a tasteful salad garnish, stuff prunes with cottage or cream cheese, or with peanut butter.

Puddings, dumplings, shortcakes--served with or without cream-- are prune desserts worth trying. For an extra special dessert there's upside-down cake made with pitted whole or half prunes. Over a thick sirup, and the prunes in the bottom of a thick skillet, pour a cottage pudding mixture and bake--as for any upside-down cake.

Dry Beans

Colorful as a travel folder are the names of the many dry bean varieties. But whatever the name of the bean--Great Northern or brown Pinto--California white or Mexican red--yellow eye or pink--navy or lima--it is always a good and inexpensive source of energy.

Dry beans are also good sources of iron, vitamins B1 and G, and they contain calcium and phosphorus. There is a large amount of valuable protein in beans, but like all plant protein this is "incomplete", and must be supplemented in the diet by animal protein in foods such as milk, eggs, meat, and fish.

Overnight soaking in water to cover should be preliminary to all bean cooking. Of course, the beans are picked over carefully first, washed many times in cold water. If possible, have the water for cooking the beans soft, because mineral salts in some water makes the beans hard when they are cooked. Simmer beans either in the water in which they have been soaked or in fresh. Some food value is lost if the water is discarded, but many persons object to the strong flavor of beans cooked in the water in which they are soaked.

Long slow cooking with water added from time to time is the rule for beans whether they are boiled--baked--scaloped--or put in soup. Pieces of salt meat, pickles, tomato sauce, crisp bacon slices, or a bit of lemon are good to serve along with or combined in bean dishes for flavor contrast.

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THE MARKET BASKET

by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOME-MADE QUICK BREADS

Summer's officially here again. Days are at their longest. "Fair and warmer" is the weather man's refrain. Tuneful as an operetta is the tinkling of ice against drinking glasses. And problem number one in the minds of meal planners is "What's something appetizing to serve these hot days?"

One answer to that question is "home-baked quick bread." For even when it's ninety in the shade no family is satisfied with all-cold meals. Bread, fresh from the oven, is one way to work a necessary hot dish into the menu.

Some kind of bread, nutritionists point out, should be served at every meal to those who need plenty of energy food. If the family gets barely as many fruits and vegetables as it needs, at least half this bread may well be made from whole-grain flour or meal. Whole-grain cereals, in addition to supplying material for energy, help to reinforce the diet in some of the vitamins and minerals — notably vitamin B and iron.

Made-to-order for summer baking at home are the quick breads, which can be stirred up in a hurry, baked quickly. This summer home bakers are finding that wheat flour and cornmeal are unusually abundant and low in price.

Most of the quick-bread recipes calling for flour are worked out on the basis of all-purpose wheat flour. However, whole-wheat flour may be substituted

for all or part of the wheat flour — cup for cup — in recipes for muffins, biscuits, waffles, griddle cakes, or fritters.

For these breads, any mild-flavored edible fat makes a suitable shortening. Best liquid for food value, flavor, and texture is milk. In any quick bread but pop-overs, sour milk may be substituted cup for cup for sweet.

Always, of course, when sour milk is substituted for sweet, there must be a change in the leavening agent. Each cup of sour milk needs $1/2$ teaspoon soda to neutralize the acid in it. $1/2$ teaspoon soda equals in leavening power 2 teaspoons of baking powder — and takes the place of that much of the baking powder in the original recipe. Add the soda with the rest of the dry ingredients. If mixed with the sour milk ahead of time, much of its leavening power goes off into thin air.

Quickest to make of all the quick breads are muffins. Secret of their success lies mostly in the mixing — and the knowing when to stop. Because the amount of flour in muffins is twice that of the liquid it is easy to develop the gluten of the flour to a point where it becomes tough. Therefore, stir muffins enough to moisten the ingredients and leave the mixture with a rough appearance. Do not mix for smoothness.

Muffins are at their best served hot from the oven with plenty of butter. But some cooks purposely make up more than their family can eat at one meal. Then they cut these "left-over" muffins in slices, butter a little, and toast them. For something special, serve with strawberry jam.

Muffins also lend themselves to tasteful variations. To a recipe calling for 1 cup liquid, add $1/2$ cup chopped dried fruit with the dry ingredients. Or add $1/4$ cup chopped nuts the same way. Or replace the regular fat in the recipe with $1/3$ cup peanut butter, or $1/2$ cup grated cheese.



To make good biscuits, stir the ingredients until well mixed, no more.

This mixture should be fairly moist at the beginning, because it will stiffen with stirring or kneading. Drop from a spoon onto a baking sheet — for crusty, flaky biscuits. Or pat the dough out about $3/4$ inch thick, and cut with a biscuit cutter.. For biscuits that rise more, knead the dough a little before rolling it out. One of the best of the biscuit variations is made by adding $1/2$ cup grated orange rind to the sifted dry ingredients. One-half cup chopped nuts may be added the same way — for a recipe that makes about 25 medium-sized biscuits.

Hot dish for the cool of the morning may be waffles or griddle cakes. Stir these enough to make the batter smooth. Do not beat them to over-develop the gluten in the flour and make the cakes or waffles tough.

Cornmeal may be substituted for all or part of all-purpose wheat flour in muffins or griddle cakes. Finely ground meal is substituted cup for cup. Coarsely ground meal should be substituted weight for weight, because less of it will be needed. However, for the most part, cornmeal works best in recipes designed especially for it. It differs from wheat flour chiefly in that it contains no gluten — the protein that gives the elastic quality necessary for doughs. Also it is heavier than wheat flour and needs more liquid.

Of all the dishes made from cornmeal -- one of the favorites since the Indians started it has been corn pone. This simple, all-American dish **recently** **was served** to the King and Queen of England — at the state dinner given for them at the White House. The corn pones accompanied Maryland terrapin — another American food delicacy. Following is one good recipe for corn pone.

Corn Pone

2 cups corn meal
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons melted fat

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk
2 teaspoons baking powder

Mix the meal, baking powder, and salt. Add the fat and warm liquid and mix well. Shape into small cakes or pones. Place on well-greased pans and bake in a hot oven for about 30 minutes.

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CHICKEN TO FRY FOR
THE FOURTH OF JULY

From coast to coast -- piece de resistance of countless summer-time meals is chicken, fried a crisp brown and heaped high on the platter.

Coming to the market now, the country over, are fairly generous supplies of chicken for frying, according to estimates of the United States Department of Agriculture. And, unless all signs fail, the number of fryers available through this summer should be somewhat larger than it was last.

For those to whom "chicken to fry for the Fourth of July" is fare as traditional as turkey for Thanksgiving, the following suggestions may come as timely reminders.

First step in getting good fried chicken is the selection of a suitable bird. If this is to come from a home poultry flock, the getting should be a simple matter -- the catching of a cockerel, obviously just right for Independence Day eating. The buying of a chicken, however, will take more care -- if less footwork.

Most important points in buying a chicken for frying are age and weight. Weight of fryers runs from 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 pounds, market dressed weight. That means, plucked but undrawn, with head and feet still on. The age of fryers will range from 14 weeks to about 5 months. One reliable clue to the age of a chicken is the feel of the breast bone. If this is very flexible, the bird is young enough to fry.

Chickens that meet these age and weight requirements should be soft meated enough that they'll cook tender by frying. The best chickens for table use are short and stocky, rather than rangy. Breasts and all bones are well-covered with flesh so that the bird has a meaty look.

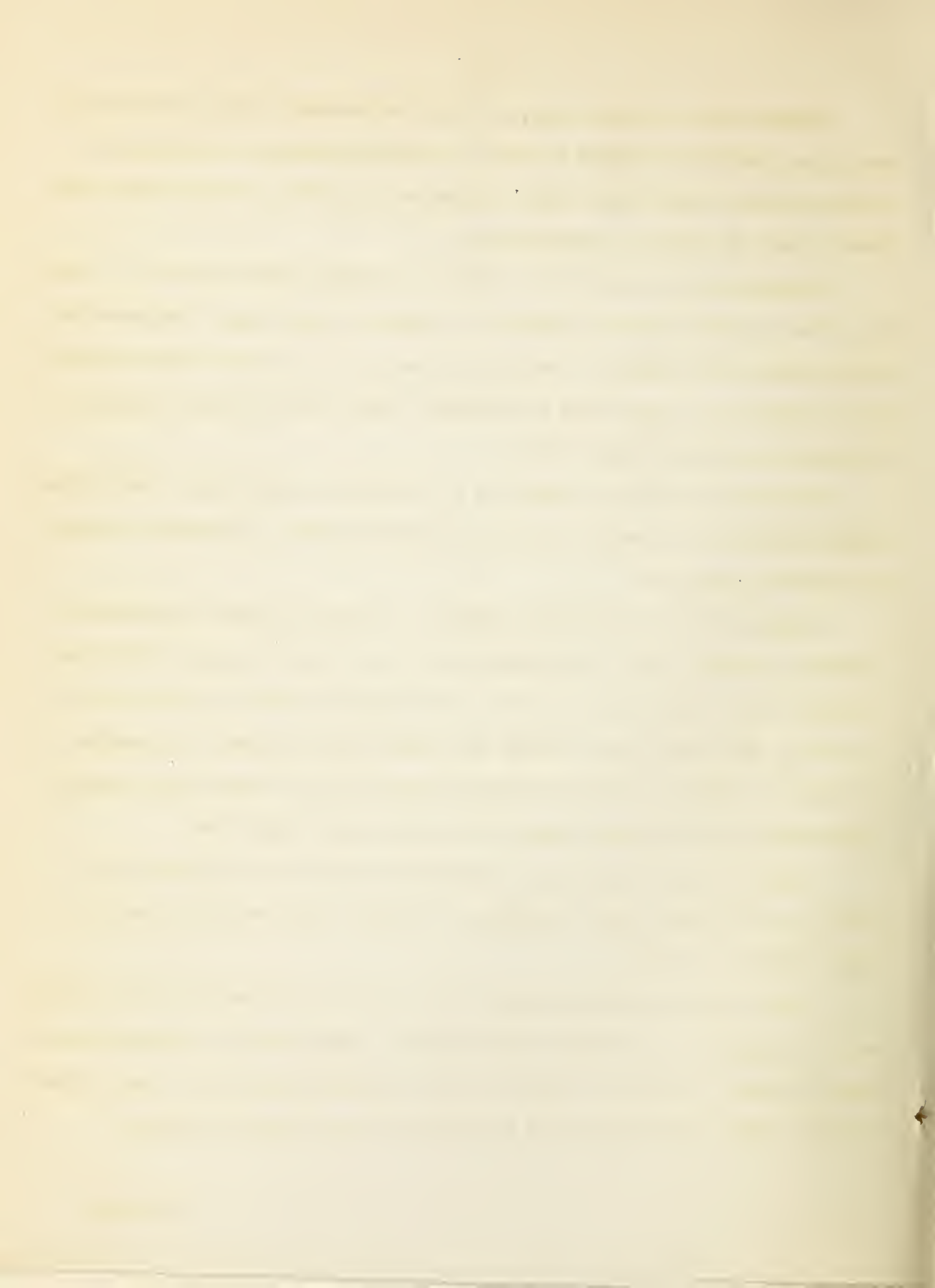
Since there is a limit to the weight of a chicken that's classed as a fryer, buying for a number of persons usually is a question of how many. The answer depends partly on the appetite of everyone concerned. But a 3-pound fryer ordinarily may be counted on to serve about four persons. That's three pounds of chicken as it's bought -- market dressed weight.

Most common way to fry chicken is in a skillet in shallow fat. But chicken fried golden brown and done to a turn is no common product. It requires a simple, yet exacting, technique.

Cut the chicken into serving portions. How much it should be disjointed depends on its size. With large fryers it is a good idea to separate thigh from drumstick and to cut the breast in two or more pieces. Often the back is cut in two, also. Cut up this way a chicken will yield about 10 pieces, not counting the neck and giblets. In the large-fryer class would be a chicken that weighed 3 1/2 pounds, market dressed weight. This should serve about five.

Salt and pepper each piece of chicken and roll in flour. Or dip the pieces in egg beaten up with a tablespoon of water -- then coat with fine dry bread crumbs or cornmeal.

Have a skillet ready with half an inch or more of well-flavored fat. Plenty of fat is needed to fry chicken without burning. Heat this fat -- but not to the smoking point. Then put the chicken in, the thickest pieces first. Leave plenty of space around each piece so that the fat may come up around the edges.



Partly cover the pan -- to keep fat from spattering -- so that the steam may escape. Turn the chicken when brown. Keep the heat moderate so that the chicken will be tender and juicy. Remove it from the pan as soon as it is done. Allow about 20 to 25 minutes for the thickest pieces of a 3-pound chicken (market dressed weight, again).

When a number of chickens are fried at one time, and skillet space is limited, or where the birds are rather large, some cooks like to finish the chicken in a moderate oven (300°F.). Take the well-browned pieces from the skillet. Put them on a rack in a pan. Cover and continue cooking in the oven until there is no pink next to the bones. Remove the cover about the last 15 minutes of cooking.

Another good way to cook fryers -- especially the smaller ones -- is in deep fat. Chickens fried this way are usually cut in quarters. Then they are either coated with an egg-and-crumb mixture or dipped in a thin batter. Proportions for a thin batter are 1 egg, 3/4 cup milk, 1 cup sifted flour, and 1/2 teaspoon salt.

Have enough fat in a deep kettle to cover the chicken without overflowing the kettle. Heat this fat to 350°F. A deep-fat thermometer clipped to the side of the kettle will help to keep the fat at the right temperature.

Lower the chicken, piece by piece, carefully into the hot fat. Do not overcrowd the kettle. When the chicken goes in, it will cool the fat somewhat. Regulate the heat so that the fat is between 300° and 325° F. throughout the frying.

Quarters of a 2 1/2 pound chicken -- dressed weight -- should be done in 10 to 15 minutes. Drain on absorbent paper and serve on a hot platter. Or, take the chicken out of the fat before it is quite done, drain, then finish cooking on a rack in a covered pan in a moderate oven. Uncover for a short time before removing from the oven.

